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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SUVA 000220

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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI MFA REITERATES: REMOVE STREET BARRIERS BY
APRIL 20; EMBASSY RESPONSES; ACTION REQUEST

REF: A. SUVA 200

- [1](#)B. SUVA 207
- [1](#)C. STATE 48129
- [1](#)D. SUVA 213
- [1](#)E. SUVA 195

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Fiji's interim government has given the Embassy until COB April 20 to remove the vehicle barriers that block the street in front of the chancery. The Suva City Council has asked the Embassy to do the deed. Other correspondence confirms the embassy has had permission to keep the street closed, until now. In a meeting today, the Suva mayor admitted the interim government is forcing the issue. Suva City understands the embassy's security concerns, but is powerless to assist. The barrier issue is receiving significant media attention. We raise pro and con arguments about who should do the dismantling, if it will occur. In comment, we note that the street is Suva's, not the embassy's. If it is to stay closed, the USG will have to influence interim PM Bainimarama. The one response that would certainly grab his attention is to threaten ongoing PKO deployments. If the street does re-open, the chancery, with absolutely no set-back, will be truly vulnerable at a time when all Fiji security elements are either incapacitated or busy "cleaning up" corruption. We await further Washington guidance. End summary.

Another dipnote: open street by Friday, April 20

[1](#)2. (U) At OOB Monday, April 16, Embassy Suva found in its fax machine the following diplomatic note from Fiji MFA, dated April 13 and faxed late April 15:

(complimentary opening)...and has the honor to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of the latter's Note No. 035 dated April 12, 2007, requesting the review of the removal of security barriers from Loftus Street by 13 April, 2007.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade has the further honor to inform the Embassy of the United States that after thorough consultations with those agencies and government departments who are concerned and directly involved with this matter, it has been decided that the barriers are to be removed with effect from Friday 20 April, 2007, and Loftus Street is to be opened for unrestricted access and normal thoroughfare by pedestrians and motorists. (complimentary closing).

And a letter from the Suva City Council

13. (U) Subsequently this morning, the Embassy received a letter dated April 16 from the Suva City Council Town Clerk, I. Verenakadavu. The letter reads:

Removal of Barriers at Loftus Street

I am to communicate with due respect that the Council has been directed by our Minister of Local Government to remove your Embassy security barriers at Loftus Street.

Within this context please find enclosed are copies of our Minister's letter to the Council and that of our Interim Prime Minister to our Minister of Local Government.

In this regard it will be highly appreciated if your Embassy takes up the responsibility of dismantling the security barriers as your Embassy has also not complied with the conditions stipulated in our letter dated 3 June 1999.

Ministerial correspondence

14. (U) We are faxing the letters from the interim PM and interim Minister for Local Government to EAP/ANP. Boiled down, on April 12, interim PM Bainimarama informed the Minister for Local Government that, subsequent to the first dipnote on the issue, it came to the interim PM's attention that Suva City Council actually provided permission for the barriers. Bainamarama now directs the Minister for Local Government to instruct the Suva City Council to "get the barriers removed" by COB Friday, April 20. The Minister for Local Government's letter to the Suva Mayor, dated April 13,

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instructs the City Council "to immediately withdraw earlier approval it had granted" for the barriers and to remove the barriers by COB that date. Included in the packet the Suva City Council provided is correspondence from the Council to Embassy Suva's admin officer of June 3, 1999, to approve installing the barriers, subject to several conditions, including that Fiji Police operate them, that they be activated only in an emergency, and that advertisements be put in the media whenever they are to be used.

And one more piece of correspondence

15. (SBU) The June 1999 approval letter was one piece of a lengthy correspondence trail that extended from the initial street closing shortly after the East Africa embassy bombings in August 1998, up to at least September 2003. The initial closing was under Fiji Police emergency-powers statutes. At the time, the Embassy was investigating a possible terrorism plot. Subsequently, the Suva City Council came to accept the street closure was sensible protection for Fiji citizens, including the bulk of embassy employees. In 2003, the Council and the Embassy came close to signing a lease allowing the Embassy to keep the street closed until 2009, then the Council received legal advice it would set a bad precedent. Still, in a letter dated Sept. 3, 2003, the Suva Town Clerk made clear, "I need to emphasize that the Council IS NOT AGAINST the partial closure of Loftus Street as well as the enforcement and security checks on vehicles as per your current practice as the Council views this as a prime requisite to secure the safety of the Embassy Officials most of whom are Fiji citizens."

Suva Mayor under pressure

16. (C) Given the state of play, on April 16 the Ambassador sought calls on interim PM and Acting interim FM Bainimarama (interim FM Nailatikau is in Brussels), interim Fijian Affairs Minister Ganilau (whose ministry has an office directly across from the chancery on Loftus Street), and Lord Mayor of Suva Ratu Peni Volavola. The interim ministers have

not responded. In a noontime conversation at the Lord Mayor's office, Volavola volunteered that Suva City Council is "having a hard time working with" the interim government. They issue demands, with no discussion. The Council sees no way to resist the street-opening order. When the Mayor raised the non-compliance issue (para 3), the Ambassador noted that correspondence continued after 1999 and subsequent arrangements were made, as is obvious from the 3 Sept. 2003 letter. Those arrangements have been complied with. A Fiji Police officer routinely "leads" the embassy's security team at the barriers to this day.

17. (C) The Ambassador stressed to the Mayor that global terrorist threats continue. A State Department public announcement was just extended yet again. Volavola reiterated he would like to be helpful, but.... He said he has told the interim Minister for Local Government that Suva City Council does not have the resources to remove the barriers. He asked Embassy Suva to do the dismantling. The Ambassador said his instructions are that the embassy is not to remove the barriers. That said, he acknowledged that the street is Suva City property, not the embassy's. The Ambassador noted that Suva City Council is well aware that the Embassy intends to build a defensible NEC outside the city center, which will free up Loftus Street in two years, assuming OBO visas are granted (ref D). The Mayor suggested that, since Fiji Police initially closed the street, perhaps the Mayor and the Ambassador should meet with the Police Commissioner. That meeting had not been confirmed by COB.

Media notes

8 (C) The barrier issue is receiving significant media coverage (reporting the Bainimarama instructions), along with Fiji military comment that perhaps the Australia and New Zealand High Commissions should relocate from Suva (septel). Mayor Volavola informed the media today that he has notified Embassy Suva to remove the barriers by the end of the week. He reportedly said Suva City does not have authority to physically remove the barriers and will not do so; but it will ensure the government's directive is followed. Volavola said the City has heard from the Embassy that it will "not impede any decision" taken to remove the roadblocks. This presumably relates to an EAC decision of April 13 that if the interim government attempts to remove the roadblocks, embassy

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security personnel will not confront but will fall back to the chancery. When door-stopped by Fiji TV outside the Mayor's office, the Ambassador said only: "We are dealing with a serious security issue and are attempting to do so through diplomatic channels."

The barriers; an issue to consider

19. (C) The barriers are made of concrete and steel, with manual hydraulic steel lifts. We have presumed that, not wanting to make it appear the USG is acquiescing, we would not remove the barriers ourselves but would watch from a distance if the interim government sends workers in to do the removal. It bears considering, though, that, if we presume a future government would permit re-installation of the barriers, we could agree to do the removal ourselves, thus ensuring the arms, at least, could be re-used. We might also attempt to save the bases for future use, though our guess is the military would never allow it. Just last week, we saw that bases, put in place a year ago by the UK High Commission on city streets for vehicle barriers but not utilized once the Qarase Government issued a veto, had been removed.

Comment

110. (C) Embassy Suva has always accepted that Loftus Street belongs to Suva City, and, if Suva City really wants to, it can re-open the street. From the initial negotiation with MFA and Suva City in 1998 until now, we managed to keep the

road closed. Pretty clearly, the Suva City Council would be willing to continue that arrangement for another two years, until a new NEC is ready, except for the interim government's pressure. (Note: NEC construction, of course, depends on another problem: the interim government's refusal, to date, to issue diplomatic visas to OBO overseers.) Bainimarama made blatantly obvious late last week that the street re-opening pressure is a tit-for-tat response to USG post-coup sanctions. He indicated that he believes the U.S. has no more ammo in its clip.

¶11. (C) We seek Washington guidance on next steps regarding the barriers, and the NEC visa issue. If the interim government removes the barriers this Friday, life will go on; but the embassy community will be wide open to any terrorist group that wants a soft target. Visa applicants, who line up across the street before their appointments, would be especially vulnerable. Prior to the coup, we had some confidence in the Fiji Police Tactical Response Unit as an additional protection. Bainimarama shut that unit down; and the military, itself, is way too busy running the country and "cleaning up" to spend much time worrying about Loftus Street. Without the barriers, we will be truly vulnerable. If necessary in coming days, we may need to utilize the media aggressively to remind how the barriers respond to a real threat and protect Fiji citizens as well as Americans. We do not expect such arguments to sway Bainimarama. If he is to be swayed, we believe it will only be by demonstration that the USG has more ammo and is willing to use it. One option, of course, is to reconsider Fiji's participation in USG-funded MFO Sinai and/or in UN PKO. Any threat to Fiji's on-going PKO deployments would certainly grab Bainimarama's, and the Fiji military's attention.

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